

Withdrawal deadline lapses as Israel says troops will stay at five key posts in south Lebanon



Beirut, February 18 (RHC)-- Israel has missed the Tuesday deadline for its withdrawal from Lebanon, announcing it would remain in five occupied "strategic" locations within Lebanese borders.

Under a ceasefire deal reached between the occupying entity and the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah on November 27th, Tel Aviv had to withdraw its forces from Lebanon's occupied areas but the deadline was extended to February 18 after Israel refused to comply with the agreement.

The withdrawal deadline expired on Tuesday (February 18th) for Israel, which has ordered its forces to remain in five strategic locations in south Lebanon in defiance of the truce and despite Hezbollah's warnings that the regime is violating the agreement.

Israeli troops, for the time being, remain at the outposts in Lebanon "so we can continue to defend our residents and to make sure there's no immediate threat," said Israel's military spokesperson Nadav Shoshani on Monday.

Hezbollah opened a support front for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip after Israel unleashed a genocidal war on the besieged territory on October 7, 2023, launching numerous retaliatory attacks against targets in the occupied lands.

Israel was forced to accept the truce with Hezbollah after suffering heavy losses on the battleground and failing to achieve its goals despite killing over 4,000 people in Lebanon.

During the months-long occupation of southern Lebanon, an estimated 100,000 people were internally displaced.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah said at the weekend that Israeli forces that are still in the Arab country after Tuesday would be considered an occupying force.

In a statement released by the Lebanese presidency on Monday, Lebanon's newly-elected President Joseph Aoun expressed concern that the Israeli forces might not fully withdraw by the February 18 deadline, stressing that Beirut is working to achieve a full Israeli withdrawal.

"The important thing is to achieve the Israeli withdrawal," Aoun insisted, adding: "We are continuing contacts on several levels to push Israel to respect the agreement and to withdraw on the scheduled date, and return the prisoners."

Earlier, Lebanese representatives on the ceasefire oversight committee, which includes officials from the United States, France, and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), had rejected Tel Aviv's request to remain in at least five military posts in Lebanon until February 28, ten days beyond the extended deadline for the withdrawal.

Washington had reportedly told Tel Aviv that Israeli troops must withdraw from southern Lebanon by February 18, with no further extensions to the ceasefire.

According to Lebanese media, there have been over 830 Israeli violations since the ceasefire took effect at the end of November.

The original agreement mandated that Lebanon's military should deploy alongside UN peacekeepers as Israel withdrew, while Hezbollah was also to pull back north of the Litani River.

This is not the first time the Tel Aviv regime has occupied Lebanon. Israeli forces withdrew from the Arab country in 2000 after 22 years of occupation.

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